

19th Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 23, Year A

A Sermon Preached by Nia Starr

and Fr Ian M Delinger

on October 11, 2026

Exodus 32:1-14 / Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 / Philippians 4:1-9 / Matthew 22:1-14

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in Your sight,
O God, our strength and our Redeemer.*

Who feels sorry for the man without a wedding robe who was thrown into the outer darkness? Show of hands. Why? If I were invited to a wedding banquet unexpectedly, while I was casually minding my own business, I would not be sartorially prepared. So, I can understand why anyone would think that Jesus' parable is a bit harsh.

But this is Jesus, and there are more to His words than we understand on first read. And I'm going to use a real person as an example of the man without the robe. You might think I'm being harsh or judge-y, but I'm going to use the facts of a public person's life to illustrate what Jesus is saying in this parable.

Who remembers the *Jim & Tammy Show*? They were Christian televangelists in the 1980s. Jim Bakker would give a fiery sermon, and a heavily make-upped Tammy Faye would cry, and black streaks of mascara would run down her face. And the money would flow in! They *publicly* lived a super opulent lifestyle, with huge salaries and bonuses, a houseboat, fancy cars, lavish jewelry, and houses and apartments in 4 different states. And Jim would justify it by saying that they needed "good bait" – their riches – to be effective "fishers of men."

But they lost it *all* because of a sexual assault allegation followed by a payoff for her silence – with the ministry's money – and convictions on 24 counts of fraud

and conspiracy. Prosecutors described Jim Bakker as a “most brazen, accomplished con man”.

Why would I eulogize Jim Bakker who died this past week? Because Jim Bakker was the man without the wedding robe. In Jesus’ parables, there are more to His words than we understand on first read. Jesus tells us:

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

I haven’t been to many wedding banquets, but I’ve been to enough to know that they are full of love, joy and abundance. In Jesus’ time and place, royal banquets were used in literature as the epitome of God’s love, joy and abundance. The people hearing Jesus’ parable would have been like: *Heck! Yeah! If the Kingdom of Heaven is like a royal banquet, I want me some of that!*

But then Jesus goes on to illustrate that there are many – even those closest to the king – who couldn’t be bothered to attend the banquet. They deemed other activities more important. Just like the Israelites betrayed YHWH and built a golden calf to worship, so were the Jews of Jesus’ time who wouldn’t accept YHWH’s son, and Matthew’s Jewish audience would have picked up on that. So, the king then cast a wide net – both the good and the bad: *all* are now welcome to the banquet. That’s a new community that is willing to accept YHWH’s son. Anyone – the good and the bad – you are welcome ... as long as you were willing to get on that journey that leads to amendment of life and follow Jesus. And one was not willing – he just wanted to be at the party. The wedding robe symbolizes the amendment of life to follow Jesus.

Jim Bakker never had a wedding robe. He had a robe, for sure. He had several robes over his career in order to get into the parties. But it was never the proper robe. He never intended to undergo an amendment of life to truly follow Jesus. And while we initially feel sorry for the man thrown into the outer darkness, we have to realize that he symbolizes the imposter.

What we do as people of faith is work toward amendment of life to have a deeper relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Baptismal Covenant gives us a blueprint, a map of how to do that. Rather than recite the whole Baptismal Covenant – which we renewed only a month ago – the Catechism offers a short summary. It asks:

Q. What is the duty of all Christians?

A. The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

That leads to amendment of life and a deeper relationship with God. That's *not* what was going on in the *Jim and Tammy Show*, but they had really nice "robes", so many people thought they belonged at the wedding banquet.

How do we make sure that we have the right wedding robes? How do we amend our lives to better follow Jesus? It's the age-old balance of faith and works. We deepen our faith through both knowledge and experience. So, we read our bibles and do the exegesis, and we try to do what Jesus tells us in the Gospels, the various ways that we can express our love of God and of Neighbor.

You may have noticed the final blessing when Bishop Lucinda visits has been incorporated into the Prayers of the People:

May God bless you with DISCOMFORT at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with ANGER at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with TEARS to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain to joy.
And may God bless you with enough FOOLISHNESS to believe that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

It's not the Bishop's blessing – it's not her original work. It's called the Franciscan Benediction. It's sometimes called the *Four-Fold Benedictine Blessing*, which is a bit more accurate because it wasn't written by a Franciscan. The prayer is officially called *A Non-traditional Blessing*, written in 1985 by Benedictine nun Sister Ruth Marlene Fox. So, it's not Franciscan and it's not ancient. But it's powerful and pertinent. It gives us concrete ways

to work, pray, and give for the spread of the kingdom of God.

It offers one framework for putting on the right robe for the wedding banquet. We often get too comfortable, or too uncomfortable with discomfort, to do the hard work, and we feel that we can't make a difference and spread the Kingdom of God. And when we realize that we are stuck, what do we do? We ask for God's help. The Baptismal Covenant: each challenging question is answered with *I will, with God's help*.

Jim Bakker did *not* have

DISCOMFORT at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships.

He did *not* have

ANGER at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people.

He did *not* have

TEARS to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger, and war.

Tamy Faye had plenty of tears, but they weren't for that. But Jim Bakker *did* have

enough FOOLISHNESS to believe that he could make a difference in the world.

Just not in the way that the Four-Fold Blessing calls for.

The Christian Church is all about reconciliation and forgiveness. It's the only institution that has a strong emphasis on it. That means the opportunity to come to the banquet with the right robe is out there. So, in his book, *I Was Wrong*, Bakker wrote that, while in prison, he came to understand that Jesus "*did not have one good thing to say about money.*" And:

*When I came to the awareness that I had actually been contradicting Christ,
I was horrified.*¹

Yet ... he went on to start a new televangelist TV show with his new wife, and he again swindled money out of his viewers. Another fake robe.

We're told not to speak ill of the dead. But there are few objective real-life examples of the man without the wedding robe. This confusing reference that Jesus' uses requires more than just a dry, academic explanation. We need to have no questions about why he was thrown into the outer darkness lest we are the ones without the wedding robe because we're too reserved to see the examples right in front of us.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/10/05/us/jim-bakker-dead.html>

Jim Bakker didn't swindle me, so I have nothing to forgive him for. I see him as another child of God whose issues are between him and God. But, dude, at least *try on* the wedding robe ... or just don't accept the invitation to the banquet.

We are *all* invited to this banquet – the good and the bad – *all* of us. All that is asked of us is to be on that journey that leads to amendment of life. That is why the Franciscan Blessing – the Four-Fold Benedictine Blessing – must be a part of our spiritual diet. We need God to bless us with Discomfort, Anger, Tears and Foolishness so that we can be empowered to do the work and avoid the temptation. The Discomfort, Anger, Tears and Foolishness drive our amendment of life so that we are not left without a wedding robe.

I've pointed out before that being a Christian is hard work. To put on that wedding robe – to amend your life in order to follow Jesus – is hard work. Is it easier to worship something else – a golden calf – that doesn't require anything of us? Absolutely! Amassing financial and material wealth, following favorite sports teams and engaging in activities that make us grin are so much easier and require no amendment of life! It's easy to ignore God and God's demands.

But we're here. And we're here for the journey because we believe that our salvation is worth it. And not just our salvation is worth it, but as Nia helped us realize last week, all of Creation is worth it. The journey is worth asking to be blessed with enough Discomfort, Anger, Tears and Foolishness to change this world into a better place. None of us are perfect. But we have made the commitment to be on this journey and to be on it together, supporting one another along the way. And we will, with God's help.

We are all invited to the wedding banquet. We have put on the wedding robe. We have decided to follow Jesus and take the journey of amendment of life. May God direct our Discomfort, Anger, Tears & Foolishness in ways that bring the Kingdom of Heaven to *all*.